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Webbing the Wonders of Webinars: An Autoethnographic Inquiry on Online Professional Learning

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Abstract

As the educational front liners, teachers' access to quality and sustainable professional development (PD) is imperative, as it is vital in delivering quality education and improving student learning outcomes. However, this may not always be a reality particularly in low-resource settings, where teachers' PD may not be a priority or is just too costly to be implemented in a wide scale. Using analytic autoethnography, this study examined aspects of my experience, perspective, and memory in successfully completing 66 webinar sessions of the American English (AE) Live: Teacher Development Series, a PD program sponsored by the U.S. Department of State through the Online Professional English Network (OPEN). Acting as a reflective practitioner and teacher-as-researcher, I unraveled how I traversed the World Wide Web in search for free and quality PD, how I completed 11 sets of live webinar sessions from January 2018 to July 2021, how I became an agent for my own professional learning, why I believe about webinars' potential for teachers' PD, and what it could do to inform my pedagogical decisions. Data from my learning journal, webinar discussion posts, and interaction with my fellow participants revealed that the AE Live Webinar Series is an effective PD for teachers based on its content, active learning engagement, collaboration, models of effective practice, coaching and expert support, opportunities for feedback and reflection, and sustainability, making it a practical teachers' PD platform particularly in low-budget countries such as the Philippines. Andragogical and heutagogical implications are provided in the light of these findings.

Introduction

Since their inception several decades ago with the trailblazing innovations such as University of Illinois and Control Data Corporation's PLATO (Programmed Logic for Automated Teaching Operations) in 1975, Cornell University's CU-SeeMe in 1992, PictureTel's LiveShare Plus in 1995, Microsoft's NetMeeting in 1996, PlaceWare's Auditorium in 1997, and ActiveTouch's WebEx Meeting Center in 1999 that aimed to unite and promote features such as web forum, online chat, instant messaging service, email, remote desktop, and document collaboration (TrueConf, 2020), webinars have increasingly emerged as this generation's go-to real-time online platform famed for their ability to reach anyone, anywhere, at any time. Since then, webinars have

been used in several contexts such as business meetings, customer service, product launches, training, among others (Mittal, 2020). In the context of teaching and learning, webinars have found a special place in the educational landscape across the globe, as it has become a common tool for connecting teachers and students for curriculum and instruction (Polanco-Bueno, 2012; White, 2019), teacher professional development (Mai & Oriciano, 2017), deployment of specific school programs for teachers (Hoke et al., 2018), and virtual teaching (Burns, 2020), *inter alia*. Webinars have afforded the world waves of wonderful opportunities and offered promise of global interconnectivity and sustainability worthy of exploration and maximization.

Webinar, a neologism and portmanteau of *web* and *seminar* which is used to refer to a live online educational presentation that is mediated technologically via web cameras and voice over IP (Gegenfurtner & Ebrner, 2019), is a term that could be traced to the late 1990s, particularly during the launching of PlaceWare's Auditorium in 1997, which was considered to be the first-ever webinar to hold up to 1,000 people in one seminar or conference (TrueConf, 2020). A certain Eric R. Korb registered the WEBinar trademark in 1998, but the rights to which were transferred to InterCall in the same year (Johnson, 2019). And with the widespread penetration of broadband access across the globe, video conferencing through webinars have become a commonplace to many. From the Flash technology created back in 1996 to WebRTC and UltraHD+ of today, the webinar technology has completely gone a long way and is still moving forward and making waves of innovation for the benefit of all. At present, there are over 50 web conferencing software that are capable of running webinars, which are available for Linux, macOS, and Windows platforms, including Adobe Connect, BigBlueButton, Cisco WebEx, GoToWebinar, Google Meet, Livestorm, MegaMeeting, Microsoft Teams, Skype, TrueConf, Zoho, and Zoom Video Communications, to name a few (McLaughlin, Martinez, & Brame, 2020). These webinar platforms which may be free, ad-supported or subscription/paid also come with downloadable applications via App Store and Google Play for iOS and Android devices, respectively (Beal, 2020). Some of the common and useful features of webinars include video conferencing, screen sharing, media file sharing, webinar recording, and live chatting and polling, making them an excellent and efficient way for a presenter to give, receive, and discuss information in real time (McLaughlin, Martinez, & Brame, 2020; Beal, 2020).

In recent years, the use of webinars and web conferencing systems in education globally has gained an increasing interest and attention (McKinney, 2017; Goe, Ipsen, & Bliss, 2018; Gegenfurtner & Ebrner, 2019). Webinars gained both appraisals and criticisms. Several researchers applauded webinars' affordances for providing students opportunities to access education through digital learning environments using their computer devices (Carrick et al., 2017; Gegenfurtner, Schwab, & Ebner, 2018; Ebner & Gegenfurtner, 2019; Tseng, Cheng, & Yeh, 2019), as well as their useful features such as flexibility, interactivity, cost, convenience, connection, communication, content, and capture (Saljo, 2019; Beal, 2020). However, some educators and institutions also expressed their concerns about employing webinar technology into education, raising issues on digital divide particularly those living in low-bandwidth and low-tech areas, non-conducive environment of the students for learning due to interruptions or disruptions, expensive Internet data, and other technical problems associated with the use of webinars such as unavailability or lack of Internet-connected computer devices, incompatibility with all kinds of Internet browsers or mobile devices, system configuration issues, firewalls, complicated technology, to cite a few (Gegenfurtner & Ebrner, 2019). Nevertheless, some researchers have

recommended further exploration of the viability of webinars in promoting active learning and achievement among learners (Lieser, Taff, & Murphy-Hagan, 2018; Gegenfurtner & Ebner, 2019), conducting professional training (Malik et al., 2015), and facilitating teacher training and professional development (Mai & Oriciano, 2017; Hoke et al., 2018).

Webinars for Teacher Professional Development

The egression and utilization of virtual face-based online learning in the form of webinars for teacher professional development (TPD) remains uncommon (Mai & Oriciano, 2017; Burns, 2020), as recent studies on webinars primarily focus on webinar integration into the curricula of distance education and blended learning programs (Cornelius & Gordon, 2013; Khechine, Lakhali, Pascot, & Bytha, 2014), student achievement outcomes (Spalla, 2012; Harned, et al., 2014), and effects of webinars on participant learning (Means et al., 2010). Research on webinars primarily deals with their affordances for curriculum integration and student learning outcomes, with little attention given to the intersection of webinars and teacher TPD. Being a developing field of research (Kennedy, 2016), TPD has gained increased attention particularly with the pronouncements of the Sustainable Development Goal 4 – Quality Education, delineating the significant role of teachers as the key to achieving all of the SDG4 – Education 2030 agenda (UNESCO, 2015). Defined as activities that develop an individual's skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics as a teacher (OECD, 2020), TPD is seen as an essential driver to producing quality teachers who in turn make up quality schools (Mai & Oriciano 2017), and as a keystone in strengthening educators' performance levels and raising student achievement (Mizell, 2010).

As the educational front liners, teachers need support for continuing professional development that will enable them to make informed decisions in their pedagogy and to deliver effective and quality education to their students. However, high-quality teaching demands high-quality PD which also demands time and resources (Burns, 2011), a reality that remains to be a huge challenge particularly in the world's poorest and most fragile countries (Lawrie & Burns, 2013), as PD programs entail the use of resources such as teacher time; training and coaching; administration; materials, equipment, and facilities; travel and transportation; and university tuition and conference fees (Odden et al., 2002 in Mabuan, 2018). Hence, there is a need to find alternative and cost-effective means for TPD.

With the increasing demand for and rising costs of TPD, it is highly advisable for educators to find alternative means for their professional development, without spending huge amounts of money and without leaving their classrooms and students behind. One practical option for teachers is to participate in PD-related webinars, which will allow them to engage in personal, face-based approach to teacher training without them being actually present in the room, but instead be seen and heard with the aid of the latest videoconferencing technology (Lectura, 2018). In recent years, webinars have become popular across the globe as several institutions started to offer free webinar series that are open for all. For example, for the year 2020 alone, free webinars tackling various themes are delivered by field experts for all teachers to participate in. Some of the webinar topics focus on English language teaching such as the ones offered by the British Council

(<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/news-events/webinars>), Pearson English (<https://www.pearson.com/english/professional-development/webinars.html>), and Cambridge Assessment English (<https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/teaching-english/resources-for-teachers/webinars/>); conducting, writing and publishing research by Elsevier (<https://www.elsevier.com/solutions/ssrn/webinars>); teaching and learning with technology by Microsoft Education (<https://www.microsoft.com/en-ph/education/training-and-events/events-calendar>); various trends in education by Education Week (<https://www.edweek.org/ew/marketplace/webinars/webinars.html>) and Terrapinn for EduTech Asia (<https://www.terrapinn.com/exhibition/edutech-asia/Webinar.stm>), to mention a few. In particular, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) (<http://www.ascd.org/professional-development/webinars/ascd-webinar-archive.aspx>) has been offering free webinars for all since 2010, tackling a spectrum of themes in the educational landscape. Likewise, MacMillan Education (<https://www.macmillanenglish.com/training-events/webinar-archive>) also offers hundreds of free webinars across various topic categories such as pre-primary, primary, teens, secondary, young adult, adult, exams, technology, etc. Participating in these webinars allows teachers to keep abreast with educational trends and engage with field experts as well as with fellow webinar participants from various parts of the world. Participants may also access downloadable webinar recordings from the hosts' archives, including free handouts and PowerPoint slides. They may also receive free certificates upon completion of webinars, which they could use to increase their PD points in their professional portfolio. Requiring only an Internet-connected device, teachers can participate in webinars and can open pathways to limitless PD opportunities from the comfort of their homes.

American English (AE) Live Webinar Series: An Open TPD for All

This paper expresses my personal experience and viewpoints upon successfully completing 11 sets of free webinars offered by the American English (AE) Live: Teacher Development Series – a teacher professional development program by the Online Professional English Network (OPEN), which is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State with funding provided by the U.S. Government and administered by FHI 360 (<https://www.openenglishprograms.org/LiveEvents>). American English Live offers three series each year of six Facebook Live professional development sessions for English language educators around the world. Since 2018, 11 sets have already been offered, with themes covering a variety of topics on English language teaching techniques and methodologies presented by U.S. TESOL professionals. The series events take place every other Wednesday during the series at 8 a.m. and 1 p.m. Eastern Time from Washington, D.C. At the end of each session, participants can complete a short quiz to earn a digital badge which is sent to the participants' email. Participants who complete four out of six sessions within a series earn an e-certificate from the Regional English Language Office or local U.S. Embassy.

The Facebook live sessions are 60-minute web-based seminars which include visual presentations, videos, and discussions. Interested participants may register through this link, <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2020WS8>, and may participate in the live webinar via the American English for Educators Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/AmericanEnglishforEducators/>, or through Zoom, <https://eca>

state.zoom.us/j/975451162. Participants may also join the associated Ning –<http://americanenglishwebinars.com> – to participate in discussions, view and download related materials, and find recordings. They may also access the webinar recordings after the live sessions at the American English YouTube channel under the AE Live! Teacher Professional Development Events playlist (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBQ58amRJh3anfDtob6sBSQ>). The American English (AE) Live: Teacher Development Series has already reached its eleventh set as of July 2021, totaling 66 live sessions tackling various topics, as shown in Table 1. I have completed all these 66 sessions which started to run in January 2018, and I received 66 badges which are digitally stored at Badgr.com as proof of webinar completion.

Table 1. American English (AE) Live Webinar Series Topics

Series	Topics
1	1.1. Creating a Positive Classroom Community 1.2. Exploring Generational Culture through Oral Histories 1.3. Two Frameworks for Teaching Culture and Critical Thinking 1.4. Keep It Moving: Ideas for Fun, Active Classroom Activities 1.5. The Pinwheel: A Classroom Structure for Simulating Authentic Intergroup Contact 1.6. Playing with Words: Creative Ways to Engage EFL Learners with New Vocabulary
2	2.1. Dynamic Ways to Check Answers and Share Responses in the EFL Classroom 2.2. Got Consistency? How Routines Support Effective Classroom Management and Teacher Planning 2.3. Strategies for Managing Large Classes 2.4. Creating and Adapting Materials for a Multilevel Class 2.5. News They Can Use: Creating a Digital Newspaper 2.6. We Like to Move It: Hands-on Language Learning with Mobile Devices
3	3.1. Empowering Students to Solve Local Problems: Adapting Materials with Service Learning 3.2. Designing and Leading Professional Development for Teachers 3.3. Embracing Social Media to Engage Students and Teach Narrative Writing 3.4. Developing Teacher Leadership Skills: Instructional Coaching Techniques for EFL Educators 3.5. Effective Strategies for Teaching Large, Multilevel Classes 3.6. Adapting Your Materials for Use in Mixed Ability Classrooms
4	4.1. Increase Student Motivation with Universal Design in Mind 4.2. Assess and Motivate: Student Portfolios and Self-Assessments in the EFL Classroom 4.3. Implementing Content-Based Language Instruction in your Classroom 4.4. Using Graphic Organizers to Promote Students' Academic Language Production 4.5. Effective Grammar Teaching: Balancing Input and Output 4.6. Communicative Grammar with Games for the Young Learner
5	5.1. Practical Applications for Critical Thinking in English Language Teaching and Learning 5.2. Animating Your Instruction: Using Comics and Graphic Novels in the English Language Classroom 5.3. Creating Comics to Think Critically 5.4. Motivating Your Students with Rules, Routines, and Rewards 5.5. Making Grammar and Vocabulary Learning Stick by Weaving a Critical Thinking Web 5.6. Enhancing Learner Motivation in the EFL Classroom
6	6.1. Digital Literacies: Practical Approaches for the ELT Classroom 6.2. Technology-Enhanced Task Engagement in English Language Instruction

Series	Topics
	6.3. Task-Based Language Teaching for Designing Grammar-Focused Communicative Activities 6.4. Developing Grammar Proficiency through Communicative Activities 6.5. Formative Assessment Strategies for the Student-centered Classroom 6.6. Student-centered Speaking Activities to Increase Fluency and Accuracy
7	7.1. Foundations of TESOL Methodology 7.2. Integrated Skills: Combining Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, and Grammar 7.3. Using Brain-based Strategies and Critical Thinking to Maximize Vocabulary Acquisition 7.4. Needs Assessment for Course or Curriculum Design 7.5. Teachers Working Together: A Successful Community of Practice 7.6. Connecting to Learn: Growing Professionally through Teacher-to-Teacher Engagement
8	8.1. Promoting Reading Fluency with the ACTIVE Framework 8.2. Making Reading Fun: Engaging Pre-Reading Activities for ELLs 8.3. Bringing Grammar to Life with Experiential Learning 8.4. No-Prep Communicative Grammar Activities 8.5. Adaptable Speaking Activities for Pairs and Groups 8.6. Classmates as Language Learning Allies: Activities to Encourage Student-to-Student Interaction
9	9.1 Random or Intentional? Putting Learners in Groups that Work 9.2 Dynamic Ways to Increase Student-to-Student Interaction 9.3 Strategic Corrective Feedback in the EFL Classroom 9.4 Amplifying Voice and Choice in the Classroom 9.5 Superpowering Your Lecture: Activity Ideas to Engage Learners and Gather Feedback 9.6 Discussion Strategies that Cultivate Meaningful and Effective Conversation Practice
10	10.1 Unleashing Your True Teaching Power: Interaction in Online Learning Environments 10.2 Creating Community Online 10.3 Tips and Activities for Creating a Communicative EFL Classroom Using Online Meeting Software 10.4 Increasing Student Talk Time in the Online Classroom 10.5 Differentiating Instruction (online!) for Equity in Learning 10.6 Effective Assessment Practices for Synchronous and Asynchronous Learning in an Online Environment
11	11.1 “Look Away from the Screen”: Making Online Learning Three-Dimensional 11.2 Motivating with Gamification: Benefits and Cautions 11.3 Beyond “Turn and Talk”: Planning Productive Conversations for Learning and Instruction in ELT 11.4 Adventures in Grammar: The Power of Stories 11.5 The Art of Running Dictation 11.6 American English Resources for Virtual or Face-to-Face Grammar Instruction

Research Questions

This paper shows my experience-based testimony about my successful completion of American English Live: Teacher Development Series and how it has shaped and impacted my professional development as an English as a second language teacher. Specifically, I aim to address the following questions:

1. What are the features of the American English (AE) Live Webinar Series that make it an effective professional development program for teachers?
2. How do I reflect upon my PD based on my AE experience?

Method

This study utilized an autoethnographic inquiry to unravel my personal experience in participating in and completing the American English Live: Teacher Development Series as a form of my professional development. Autoethnography is “a research method that uses personal experience (“auto”) to describe and interpret (“graphy”) cultural texts, experiences, beliefs, and practices (“ethno”) (Adams, Ellis, & Jones, 2017). As a method that values stories, personal experience, and critical research, autoethnography aims to show “people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles” (Bochner & Ellis, 2006, p. 111), as it challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others (Spry, 2011) and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Autoethnography can have various forms: indigenous/native ethnography (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008); narrative ethnography (Tedlock, 1991); reflexive, dyadic interviews (Ellis, 2004); reflexive ethnography (Ellis, 2004; van Maanen, 1988); layered accounts (Charmaz, 1983); interactive interviews (Ellis, Kiesinger, & Tillmann-Healy, 1997); community ethnography (von Kardorff & Schönberger, 2010); co-constructed narratives (Toyosaki & Pensoneau, 2005; Bochner & Ellis, 2016); personal narratives (Berry, 2007; Goodall, 2006); and analytic autoethnography (Anderson, 2006).

My autoethnographic inquiry aligns with Anderson’s (2006) analytic autoethnography, which allows myself as a researcher to recognize and critically examine my experience, to produce analytic insights through recounting my own experience and thoughts, and to gain insight into some broader set of social phenomena. Further, this autoethnographic inquiry is anchored on Stenhouse’s (1975) ‘teacher-as-researcher’, Schon’s (1987a) ‘reflective practitioner’, and Farrell’s (2019) ‘reflective practice’ concepts, which are essential in helping me to develop deeper understanding of my own experience, assess my professional growth, develop informed decision-making skills, and become proactive and confident in my teaching.

Data Analysis

I used personal narratives (Tillmann, 2009) and Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner’s (2017) PD elements framework to draw upon my own experience in successfully completing 48 webinar sessions in the 8 sets of the American English Live: Teacher Development Series from January 2018 to July 2021. I analyzed my own professional learning journal, live webinar discussion posts, and chats with my fellow webinar participants from

the Philippines, which allowed me to reflect upon my over two years of webinar experience. Because I intend to make sense and draw meaning from my experience, using personal narratives seems appropriate as it “captures personal and human dimensions of experience over time, takes account of the relationship between individual experience and cultural context” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), provides an “insider view” to uncover nuance and detail of previous experiences (Wang & Geale, 2015), reveals the ways humans experience the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), and incorporates temporality and a social context which provides a window into the process of identity construction (Riessman, 2008). By employing narratives, we see “the story in the study, the tale in the theory, the parable in the principle, and the drama in the life” (Turner & Bruner, 1986; Rosaldo, 1989; Bordo, 1990). And as I immerse myself in this narrative to tell my story, may the story of others be recognized and echoed within mine.

Findings and Discussion

Exploring the Wonders of AE Webinars

Professional development for teachers can have various types. OECD (2020) lists PD types including courses, seminars, workshops, conferences, qualification programs, individual or collaborative research, and observation visits to schools, while Gaible & Burns (2005) categorized PD as standardized, site-based, and self-directed. Most of these may either require budget to avail of or require time to attend to. Teachers may not be able to access most of these PD programs due to financial constraints or work-related duties that will not allow them to leave their classes. In low-budget contexts such as the Philippines where professionals including teachers are required to obtain PD units by virtue of a national policy known as the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Act of 2016 or Republic Act No. 10912 (Official Gazette, 2016), teachers must find alternative means for their professional development without spending their modicum wages and without impacting their time-on-task with their students.

After relentless searching and scouring for cost-effective and costless ways and means to advance my knowledge and skills in English language teaching by learning new approaches and strategies, I came across the information about the American English Live: Teacher Development Series through the Regional English Language Office of the U.S. Embassy in the Philippines, which regularly shares updates about free PD programs sponsored by the U.S. Department of State through their official Facebook page at RELOManila (<https://web.facebook.com/RELOManila/>). Relevant information can also be accessed via the American English for Educators official Facebook page (<https://web.facebook.com/AmericanEnglishforEducators/>). Aside from live webinars, RELO and AE also offer free PD programs through massive open online courses (MOOCs) and MOOC camps, where I volunteered as a facilitator for other teachers. As a full-time university instructor and a part-time graduate school student, time constraints usually serve as a major hindrance to participating in conferences and workshops, as my schedule would always be devoted to teaching and graduate studies, not to mention insufficient budget for expensive PD. Hence, I needed a free, flexible, open, less time-consuming, yet quality PD so that I could continue to learn the trends in the ELT field. The perfect answer to my PD aspirations was the AE Live Webinar Series.

Participating in the American English Live: Teacher Development Series is simple, easy, and convenient. In order to get updates, I simply ‘liked’ the official Facebook pages of RELO Manila and American English for Educators. And in order to receive email updates about the webinar series, I also registered at the American English Live Events which could be found at the website of the Online Professional English Network (OPEN) (<https://www.openenglishprograms.org/LiveEvents>). On my scheduled ‘Webinar Wednesdays’, I simply log in my Facebook account, visit the AE Facebook page, and wait for the webinar to go live from Washington, D.C., either at 8 a.m. or 1 p.m. Eastern Time via Zoom. Each 60-minute webinar begins with a short introduction from the host about the topic and resource speaker. The webinars appear to follow a presentation pattern beginning with the theoretical underpinning of the topic and proceeding with the practical application of the concepts or frameworks through sample lesson plans. The webinars embed interactive questions and simple tasks, which allow the participants to engage with the material, the host and the resource speaker, as well as with thousands fellow participants from the different parts of the world. In this type of webinar, only the host and the resource speaker are seen on the Facebook live feed, while the participants take part in a “watch party” and engage through the comment, reply, and like features of Facebook. After the webinar, a link for an online quiz via SurveyMonkey is posted, containing questions for basic demographic profiles of the participants and three webinar questions. In order to pass the quiz, participants should get at least two correct answers. The badge indicating webinar completion is sent through the participants’ email within the week after the live session. Figure 1 shows a screenshot of one of the AE live webinars.

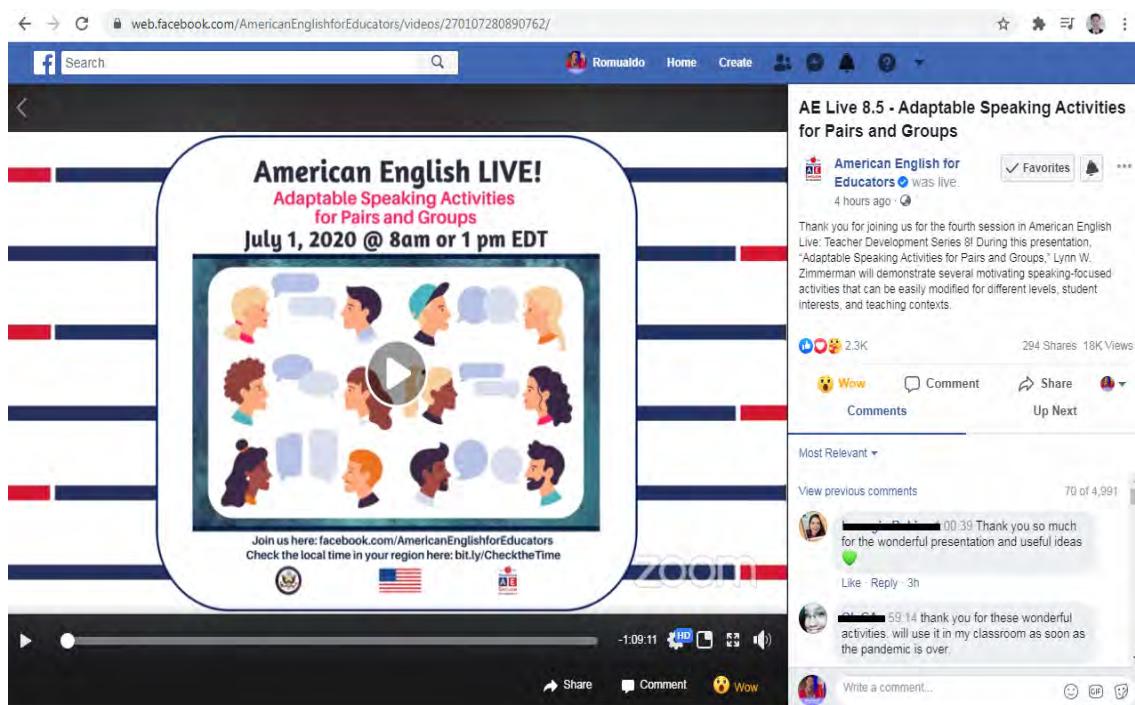


Figure 1. Screenshot of American English (AE) Live Webinar Series 8.5

Webbing, Learning, Growing Professionally

I started my online professional development journey as an American English Live: Teacher Development Series participant on January 17, 2018, when the first topic of the first series was offered to all interested

participants across the globe via the Facebook live platform. Since then, I have already completed 11 sets in the series, where each set contains six sessions, totaling 66 webinars.

The AE Live Series tackles TESOL-related themes, with each series containing related topics covering a particular theme. In Series 1, I learned various teaching techniques and strategies in creating a positive classroom community for my students and in integrating culture into language teaching and learning. I also identified practical approaches to use active learning activities in developing my students' vocabulary and critical thinking skills. Series 2 taught me effective strategies for classroom management and teacher planning, which include using routines and dynamic ways to engage my students particularly for large classes. The series also provided me new ways to harness technological affordances to support my students' English language learning by creating digital newspaper and by using mobile devices to improve their English. In Series 3, I acquired useful strategies and techniques in designing and implementing professional development with teachers and developing teacher leadership skills through coaching, as well as I learned helpful strategies in handling multilevel and mixed-ability classes and in integrating the concept of service learning in my lessons to develop my students' societal awareness and responsible citizenship. Series 4 provided me a handful of effective strategies in developing, improving, and sustaining my students' motivation to learn using portfolios and self-assessment activities guided by the universal design principles. I also learned helpful techniques in balancing content and language through content-based instruction, as well as in delivering engaging and interesting grammar lessons through graphic organizers and gamification.

Series 5 focused on providing teachers ways to develop students' critical thinking skills. I learned how to use comics and critical thinking web in developing students' grammar, vocabulary, and critical thinking skills. I also gained helpful insights in developing my students' language learning motivation by using rules, routines, and rewards. In Series 6, I learned insights in developing my students' digital literacies through technology-enhanced task engagement in English language learning. I also obtained effective tips in planning and delivering communicative grammar activities using task-based language teaching, as well as in improving my students' speaking fluency through student-centered task and assessment strategies. Series 7 taught me about the foundations of TESOL or Teaching English to Speakers of Other languages, including brain-based strategies in helping my students acquire vocabulary. I also learned effective ways in designing lesson plans integrating the English macro skills such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, and grammar. I also identified helpful ways in participating and collaborating with my fellow teachers through a community of practice, which will allow us to learn from and engage with one another. In Series 8, I learned essential frameworks in promoting reading fluency among my students. I also acquired tips on how to use experiential learning in using communicative grammar activities and in employing engaging speaking activities for dyads and small groups. Finally, I learned insights on how to promote student-to-student interaction through cooperative and community language learning among my students.

Series 9 tackled three themes on collaborative learning in the English language classroom, cultivating meaningful discussion using critical thinking skills, and corrective feedback in the English language classroom. In this series, I learned I learned strategies and techniques in grouping students for collaborative work,

increasing student-to-student interaction in the class, and cultivating meaningful and effective communication activities in the class. Likewise, I also learned strategies for providing students assessment and corrective feedback. Series 10 focused on the theme on making the transition to online or hybrid classrooms. In this series, I learned how to facilitate interaction in online learning environments, create community online among my learners and peers, create communicative online classroom, increase student engagement, apply the concepts of differentiated instruction in online learning, and use effective assessment for synchronous and asynchronous classes. Finally, Series 11 taught me useful ideas and insights about managing in-person, online, and hybrid courses, and on using innovative approaches in teaching grammar with the use of grammar games, art, and movement.

While participating in the webinars, I would jot down key points and supporting details in my learning journal using the Cornell note-taking system (Pauk & Owens, 2010), which allowed me to record lectures using telegraphic sentences; formulate questions based on my notes, clarify meanings, reveal relationships, establish continuity, and strengthen memory; say aloud in my own words the answers to the questions, facts, or ideas indicated by the cue words; reflect on the concepts presented in the webinar; summarize my notes in a short paragraph; and review my notes for the online quiz and for concept retention. After each live webinar session, I took the short multiple-choice quiz via SurveyMonkey, which was posted in the comment section of the FB live session at the American English for Educators page. The quiz questions are based on the concepts discussed in the webinars, and the quiz results are immediately provided after clicking the submit button. In order to pass the quiz, I needed to answer two of three questions correctly. After passing the quiz, I had to wait for my Professional Development Attendance Badge which is sent to my email within the week after the webinar. The badges are stored in my Badgr.com account, which allows the badges to be downloaded, printed as a certificate, or shared on different social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Pinterest as “micro-credentials” (NEA, 2018). Badgr also provides a copyable and shareable link for each of the badges which can be used for sharing in digital platforms. Each badge contains the webinar series and session numbers, the session topic, and the logos of the American flag, U.S. Department of State, and American English for Educators. When shared in public, the audience could view the badge and its short description including the title and some details about the webinar, the date it was earned and issued, the earning criteria, and the name of the host which is the American English (AE). Figure 2 shows some of the badges I earned from the AE Live Webinar Series.

In addition to issuing downloadable and shareable badges, Badgr also allows printing of badges as certificates, where each badge has its corresponding e-certificate. The certificate consists the badge itself, the webinar series and session numbers, the topic, and a short description certifying that the badge recipient successfully attended the webinar. The certificate also contains the recipient's ID, the date the badge was issued, the issuer's name, and a distinct QR code. I have printed all my certificates and added them to my professional portfolio, which I could use for workplace promotion and other opportunities. These badges and certificates are not just proofs of my webinar participation; more importantly, they are a testament to my commitment to professional development, which I hope will benefit my own students. Figure 3 shows an example AE Live Webinar Series certificate from Badgr.



Figure 2. Screenshot of American English Live Webinar Badges



Figure 3. A Screenshot of Printable AE Live Webinar Series Certificate from Badgr

My three-year journey for teacher professional development with the American English Live: Teacher Development Series did not come with challenges, as this sweet success was tested with tough trials and tribulations. I am a full-time educator handling multilevel and large classes of 40 to 45 students for 30 hours weekly, a part-time graduate school student, a faculty researcher, and a volunteer teacher facilitator in several communities. With numerous tasks to be completed and projects to be accomplished, it was easy to get

distracted, unfocused, and oblivious of my own PD. However, I remained steadfast, motivated, and determined to prioritize my personal growth and development. I learned to discipline myself to do strict time management and follow my schedule, eliminate unnecessary activities, and do things that could help advance my education such as my participation in the AE Live Webinar Series. In order not to miss any webinar, I would regularly sign up for the upcoming webinars, mark my calendar for the webinar schedules, set my mobile reminders and alarm clock, and devote time for the webinar sessions until everything became a habit.

After re-reading and analyzing my learning journal entries and evaluating my PD journey with the AE Live Webinar Series, I could say that it is indeed an effective PD program for teachers. In order to support my point, I use here Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner's (2017) seven features of effective professional development vis-à-vis my AE Live Webinar Series experience. According to them, an effective professional development is content focused, incorporates active learning, supports collaboration, uses models of effective practice, provides coaching and expert support, offers feedback and reflection, and is of sustained duration. I now discuss in turn these features as reflected in my AE Live Webinar Series PD journey.

Foremost, the AE Live Webinar Series is content focused. As aforementioned, the AE Series tackles TESOL-related themes, with each theme covering six related topics, which focus on teaching approaches, strategies, and techniques for English language teaching. The conceptual and theoretical background, including the sample lessons and activities that are presented by the resource persons focus on specific topics such as the teaching of listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, or vocabulary. Second, it incorporates active learning. In contrast to passive, lecture-based, and sometimes irrelevant traditional seminar approach, the AE Live Series engages its participants by providing highly contextualized professional learning, authentic artifacts and scenarios, and opportunities for the webinar participants to engage in the same style of learning that they are designing for their students and to think of ways to plan and try out teaching strategies appropriate to their contexts. Third, the AE Live Series supports collaboration. It creates a space for the webinar participants to engage, interact, and share ideas among themselves, before, during, and after participating in the webinar. A week before the webinar, participants can access pre-webinar readings and resources at the American English Webinars's Ning under the Materials and Resources tab (<http://americanenglishwebinars.com/page/page/list>), as well as participate in pre-webinar discussions on the American English for Educators Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/AmericanEnglishforEducators/>). During the webinar, the participants can actively participate in the embedded interactive tasks and mini-forums, allowing host-to-participant and participant-to-participant interactions. Participants can respond to the resource person's or host's questions, do the mini tasks related to the topic, ask questions, and respond to the comments of their fellow participants through the Facebook comment section. After the webinar, participants can engage in post-webinar discussion or reflection questions posted at the AE Ning, access and download the webinar recording and presentation slides or PDFs. Participants may also access, replay, or download webinar recordings at the American English YouTube Channel (<http://youtube.com/StateAmericanEnglish>) and the American English for Educators Facebook page (under Videos) (<https://www.facebook.com/AmericanEnglishforEducators>). This element of collaboration is further extended by many Filipino teachers in their monthly schools' learning action cells (SLAC), where they could share the teaching techniques and strategies they learned from the webinars with their fellow teachers. As

one fellow webinar participant shared: *“I’m really thankful about the AE Webinars because I could learn the latest scientific approaches in teaching the English language and share them with my colleagues during our LAC sessions. We can adapt our new learning to our curriculum so that we can have better and more effective teaching.”*

Fourth, the AE Live Webinar Series uses models of effective practice. As the webinars are presented by U.S. TESOL professionals, the participants are provided not only research-based concepts, but also instructional models that show teachers a clear vision of what the best practices look like when applied in the actual classroom setting. The first part of the webinar usually presents the theoretical anchorage and conceptual background of the topic and proceeds with sample lesson plans with sets of activities that are demonstrated by the resource person with the participants. Alternative applications of the teaching techniques and strategies are also provided for adaptation in different classroom contexts. Fifth, the AE Live Webinar Series provides coaching and expert support. Although there is no individualized and need-based coaching provided for the participants by the resource speakers, expert support is given when the resource persons share their expertise about content and evidence-based practices based on their experience and research. The webinars are designed to address specific topics and foci that are presented with particular pedagogical strategies and techniques by TESOL specialists in various areas of ELT. Sixth, the AE Live Webinar Series offers feedback and reflection. This PD element happens during and after the webinars. For instance, during a webinar participants could ask questions and respond to prompts given by the presenter, which in turn could get feedback from the presenter, the host, or fellow participants. After the webinar, participants could reflect on the concepts discussed by answering the online quiz and by engaging in online discussion by responding to the post-webinar reflection questions in the American English Ning. Finally, the AE Live Webinar Series is of sustained duration. Unlike the common “fragmented, [and/or] intellectually superficial” (Borko, 2004) PD programs, the AE Live Series is long-term and sequential, providing participants opportunity to learn, practice, implement, and reflect upon the techniques and strategies in their practice. As previously indicated, the series has been running since January 2018 and is still in force until now, going live every other Wednesday of the series month, providing themes and topics that are relevant, timely, and applicable in various teaching contexts.

These findings delineate the effectiveness of the AE Live Webinar Series, as it incorporates the elements of an effective PD program outlined by Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner (2017), which also corroborate with the findings of some PD researchers (e.g., Burns, 2011; Zein, 2017) underscoring the significance of effective PD elements such as content, interactivity, speakers, collaboration, and sustainability. It is, however, very important to note that while the AE Live Series program appears to be well-designed to be effective, the participants’ active engagement with the webinars and maximization of the webinars’ free resources is also a significant factor for the lasting impact of the program to its participants. For instance, before each webinar, I usually download and read the pre-webinar readings posted at the American English Ning so that I could have a conceptual or theoretical background of the topic. Minutes before the webinar, I would usually find a quiet place at school or at home to watch the webinar with my learning journal ready for note-taking, participate in the webinar by responding to the prompts given by the presenter, doing the tasks, asking questions, and engaging with my fellow participants. After the webinar, I would download the webinar slides from the American English

Ning and reflect on the post-webinar questions. Whenever I felt confused about a certain concept or idea in the webinar, I would refer to the webinar recordings at the AE Facebook page or YouTube channel to review the session and clarify some vague points. I would reflect on the concepts presented, discuss them with my colleagues, and find ways to incorporate them into my lessons immediately. This practice always gives me excitement, makes my lesson planning interesting, and enlivens my typical daily teaching routines. I always feel renewed, inspired, and empowered knowing that I could have engaging, motivated, and satisfied classes by incorporating evidence-based techniques and strategies I gleaned from the webinars into my lessons. Consequently, my students also feel excited about the new lessons, activities, and technologies that I introduce to them, which results in more active and dynamic class engagements, increased interest in our lessons, and improved class satisfaction. As a teacher, I feel assured and confident that my students are on a par with other students globally because I could provide them lessons I derived from the TESOL experts.

Webbing, Reflecting, Refracting

My three-year PD journey with the American English Live: Teacher Development Series has created a positive impact in my life as an English language teacher, as it (re)shaped my teaching trajectory, opened up opportunities, and presented perspectives and paradigms. Foremost, I realized that online professional learning could be as (or even more) effective as in-person PD programs, particularly when an online PD embeds research-based elements for its effectiveness and quality. I also realized that having a self-directed or self-determined professional learning affords me freedom to choose what I want to learn, when and where to learn it, how to learn it, and why I need to learn it. My AE Live PD journey yields me that freedom and empowers me to be in control of my own professional growth and be an active agent of my own development. It gives me choice, control, and confidence to navigate the web, surf its waves, harness its power, and emerge as a winner. This PD experience including all the teaching approaches, methods, strategies, and techniques I learned from it have impacted me personally, socially, and professionally. Personally, it gave me fulfilment and happiness to achieve something worthwhile despite the surmounting hurdles and limitations. Socially, it has expanded and strengthened my network of friends and allies in the academe who, just like me, aspire to be good English language educators. Professionally, it has given me confidence and empowerment to thrive in the teaching profession and face my classes with assurance that I could deliver the curriculum correctly and effectively. The webinar themes and topics have validated my pedagogical practices, helped me make informed classroom decisions, and inspired me to try something new and to teach right. I believe that this PD journey is not just a typical learning experience; it is a transformational event with a lifetime positive effect.

Reflecting on this three-year PD journey, I realized that pursuits of professional advancements come in processes and one must be intentional and critical in setting their PD goals, exploring opportunities and possibilities, and utilizing learning to inform pedagogical practices. I developed the framework below which I called Critical Continuing Professional Development (CCPD) to guide fellow educators and professionals in planning their PD journeys and optimizing such learning experiences. The CCPD has five phases Participation, Reflection, Integration, Evaluation, and Redefinition.



Figure 4. The Critical Continuing Professional Development (CCPD) Framework

In the *Participation* phase, PD learners (henceforth, PDers) has already explored and identified a potential PD program and are ready to engage in the course or training, having matched their interests and learning goals with the program's content and target learning outcomes. This phase answers the question "*What am I going to learn?*" It involves creating a study timetable based on the program's dates, identifying joining guidelines including the technology or platform to be used, identifying pre- and post-training tasks, and actual engagement with the training facilitators, co-PDers, and the content itself. The *Reflection* phase comes after the participation. It answers the question "*What did I learn?*" It involves synthesizing the training content, outlining the main ideas learned, identifying themes and topics that are relevant to the PDer's current practice, and selecting ideas, strategies, or techniques that can be adapted/adopted in one's own context. The *Integration* phase reviews the PDer's curriculum or situation and identifies areas or contents where adapted/adopted concepts or ideas from the PD program may be integrated to improve one's practice. It answers the question "*How do I put to use what I learned?*" In this phase, localization and contextualization of the concepts to be integrated is also necessary so that they are properly embedded into practice with a proper perspective. The PDer possesses the agency, voice, and choice in the selection and integration of the derived ideas cognizant of the realities on the ground and mindful of the affordances lent by the education system that governs their practice. The penultimate phase is called *Evaluation*, and it answers the question "*How did I optimize my PD learning?*" This phase may include evaluation of the lesson, analysis of student learning outcomes, and peer evaluation results underscoring the impact of the integration into the lesson or curriculum. Finally, *Redefinition* phase answers the question "*How do I further improve my learning, what else needs to be done, and how do I maximize my next PD experience?*" This may involve improvement or change in perspectives, paradigms, or practices, and strategic plans for identifying and maximizing the next PD training. While this CCPD framework has been created as a product of

my three-year PD experience with the AE webinar series, this may also be applied in other contexts where teachers or professionals engage in PD training for their advancement in the field.

Webbing Forward

Teachers are one of the most influential and powerful forces for equity, access and quality in education and key to sustainable global development (UNESCO, 2019). In fulfilling their integral role in the society, teachers must have strong support and access to continuing professional development. However, this may not always get realized particularly in low-budget territories (Lawrie & Burns, 2013). Hence, there is a need for teachers to find alternative means for their PD and turn their gaze to a myriad of digital learning environments that provide free professional training through ubiquitous and (a)synchronous modes (Gegenfurtner & Ebner 2019). As the global trend of digitalization continues to transform the way in which teaching and learning are designed, delivered, and implemented (McKinney, 2017; Saljo, 2019), numerous opportunities for professional learning surface the web, such as the open educational resources (OER) and open educational practices (OEP) (Creative Commons, 2020), which present affordances to teachers to use free educational resources that support their professional learning by accessing digital sites to cultivate and extend their professional learning networks (Trust, Krutka, & Carpenter, 2016). My AE Live Webinar Series PD journey is a testament that online professional development could be one of the most practical and least expensive ways to engage in professional learning, provided that a teacher must have a strong desire to learn, commitment to grow professionally, and willingness to succeed amid the odds. And while there is a plethora of choices for PD programs such as free webinars, one must be critical in choosing which program to attend to by using guidelines for effective PD programs such as those outlined by Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner (2017). This is necessary so that teachers would be able to use their time, energy, and other resources effectively.

Conclusion

Driven to grow and advance professionally, I embarked on a PD journey that would emerge to have a significant role in (re)configuring my perspective about professional learning in the digital age. In this study, I have unravelled my three-year PD experience with the American English Live: Teacher Development Series, which I conjectured to be an effective PD for all English language teachers across the globe based on its elements such as content, active learning engagement, collaboration, use of models for effective practice, coaching and expert support, feedback and reflection, and sustainability (Sahin & Yildirim, 2015; Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017; Zein, 2017). With their accessibility, openness, practicality, interactivity, and sustainability, webinars could be the next big thing in teacher professional development, as they are powered by the ubiquitous Internet and modern technologies, particularly in an era when telecommuting, work-from-home, and home-based education setups start to rise globally. In order to realize this, webinar designers must be open to the current webinar studies and strive to integrate effective PD elements into their programs, redress some weaknesses, and produce more defined and carefully designed PD so that they could offer more quality education to all participants. In the same vein, teachers must actively engage in the webinars by welcoming and embracing change, navigating various learning networks in the new normal, improving digital competence, and

committing to self-management and self-determined learning. They should be open in advancing their professional growth, extend their professional learning networks, and participate actively in professional learning communities. Finally, teacher training institutions, schools, and teacher clubs, particularly those in low-resource areas, must be cognizant of these increasingly popular PD platforms in order to provide their teachers alternative professional learning pathways without spending too much of their resources. The future of teacher training, teaching, and learning is digital, and those who acknowledge this emerging educational revolution, adapt to it, and position themselves to harness its full potential, will reap its benefits and advantages. The web is wide and open, and so our minds should be.

Limitations of this study must be noted. First, this study only reflects my personal PD journey with a specific program using webinars. Hence, the findings indicated here may limit their external validity to other webinar participants' experiences elsewhere. Future studies may delve into the effectiveness of webinars among different participants across various settings and platforms, taking into account participants' level of education, digital competence, and availability of technological resources. Finally, future studies may investigate the use of webinars for teacher training in schools and how such training impacts teachers' pedagogy and student learning outcomes.

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